DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 854 EC 170 889

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TITLE An Employment Related Follow-up of Former Special Education Students in Pierce County, Washington (1983-84).
INSTITUTION Pierce County Educational Service District 121, Tacoma, WA.
PUB DATE Jul 84
NOTE 25p.; Developed by the Vocational/Special Education Cooperative.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; *Employment; Followup Studies; Postsecondary Education

ABSTRACT

The booklet reports on a study of 194 former special education students in Pierce County, Washington, who had left school during 1981-84. Questionnaires were completed by parents or guardians to collect eight items of information: (1) the student's handicapping condition while in school, (2) current employment status and job title, (3) current monthly salary range, (4) previous employment status during the past 3 years, (5) previous monthly salary range, (6) current involvement in postsecondary education programs, (7) type of postsecondary program (academic or vocational) and (8) name and location of program. Among conclusions drawn were that handicapped learners have about a 50/50 chance of being employed upon graduating or leaving secondary schools in this county; that 28% of the sample gross less than $4,800 annually and an additional 40% will earn an average wage of $7,200 per year; that 23% of the former students do not work at the present time and have not worked for the past 3 years; and that over 80% reported no involvement with postsecondary education. (CL)

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VOCATIONAL & SPECIAL EDUCATION

Educational Service District 121

PIERCE COUNTY COOPERATIVE

An Employment Related Follow-up of Former Special Education Students In Pierce County, Washington (1983-84)

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AN EMPLOYMENT RELATED FOLLOW-UP OF FORMER SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN PIERCE COUNTY, WASHINGTON (1983-84)

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July, 1984

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....1

Purpose of Study 3

Methodology.....3

Results.....5

Figure 1 (Types of Handicapped Learners Surveyed).....6

Figure 2 (Current Employment Status, 1983-84 Baseline Year).....7

Currently Employed Job Titles (Chart 1).....8

Figure 3 (Salary Range of Currently Employed Handicapped Population.....9

Figure 4 (Not Employed at Time of Study, But Had Been Employed Within the Past Three Years).....10

Job Titles For Students Not Employed at Time of Study (Chart 2).....11

Figure 5 (Salary Range of Population Not Employed at Time of Study, but Worked Within Past Three Years).....12

Figure 6 (Currently Involved in Post Secondary Educational Programs).....13

Figure 7 (Nature of Post Secondary Involvement)..14

Post Secondary Involvement (Chart 3).....15

Observations.....16

Summary.....17

References.....18

Follow-Up Questionnaire.....Appendix A

INTRODUCTION

The Educational Service District 121 Pierce County Vocational/Special Education Cooperative was formulated in the fall of 1983 to consolidate the efforts of special and vocational education on behalf of secondary level handicapped youth. One of the early initiatives for the Cooperative has been the collection of relevant baseline data to serve as criteria by which this consortium can be judged over a period of time.

The Cooperative is funded through a proportional assessment of participating districts and a supplemental grant of Title VI B special education dollars. At the present time, thirteen school districts within Pierce County, Washington, are engaged in this partnership. The Cooperative is governed by a twenty-six member advisory committee with equal representation of vocational and special educators. A full-time program manager guides the daily activities of the Cooperative.

This report, An Employment Related Follow-up of Former Special Education Students in Pierce County, Washington (1983-84), represents one in a series of three baseline data collection efforts. A Determination of Vocational Education Staff Input and Involvement in the IEP Process at the Secondary Level is available through the Cooperative office

or the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and An Assessment of Secondary Vocational Program Placements and Corresponding IEP Goal Statements is in the process of being finalized. Each study is scheduled for replication in succeeding years. Therefore, the benchmarks that are established now will have increasing importance over the years to come.

During an era of cost containment and economic austerity An Employment Related Follow-up of Former Special Education Students in Pierce County, Washington (1983-84) is a critical element in the data collection process. It represents the product assessment of the Cooperative, and denotes, at least in part, a measure of the economic impact of collaborative educational efforts on the Pierce County community at large. The report is divided into four major sections: Purpose of Study, Methodology, Results, Observations, and Summary. References and a sample data collection form are also included.

PURPOSE OF STUDY:

Two major questions underlie this study of handicapped school leavers in Pierce County, Washington:

1. What currently happens to this population with respect to work when they graduate or leave the educational system?

2. How will the baseline figures for this population be impacted after certain vocational training have been applied?

In order to respond to the first question now and later in time, this baseline study was undertaken. The study represents an important piece of the total data collection effort being conducted by the Cooperative.

As the Cooperative continues to grow, its membership needs to know what trainspired with the students who have passed through the pre-Cooperative era. Only by having this important baseline data will the Cooperative be able to judge its long term impact on employment of handicapped youths who complete some form of vocational training in the Pierce County public schools.

METHODOLOGY:

During the 1983-84 school year 100 secondary teachers were asked to follow up on five students who had graduated or had otherwise left Pierce County secondary special education programs in Pierce County during the past three years (1981-1984). From this effort, data on 194 students from ten Pierce County school systems was obtained. The 194 former

students, or parents/guardians of same, who were surveyed represent 14.14 percent of the total secondary (grades 10-12) level special education population in participating districts.

A questionnaire was designed by the data collection subcommittee of the Cooperative during the fall and winter of 1983. (See Appendix A.) The questionnaire in its final form was designed to collect eight items of information. This information includes: (1) the student's handicapping condition while in school; (2) the student's current employment status and job title; (3) current monthly salary range; (4) previous employment status during the past three years if the student is not currently employed; (5) previous monthly salary range; (6) current involvement in post-secondary education programs (if any); (7) type of post-secondary program (academic or vocational); and (8) name and location of post secondary institution and type of program.

Upon approval of the survey instrument by the overall advisory committee, all special education teachers at the secondary level in the participating districts were asked to go through former student rolls and randomly contact up to five students or the parents/guardians of former students. Contacts were made during the period of December 1983 through May 1984. The questionnaires were collected at the district level during the spring and forwarded to the Cooperative office. The raw data were hand tabulated and prepared for presentation.

RESULTS:

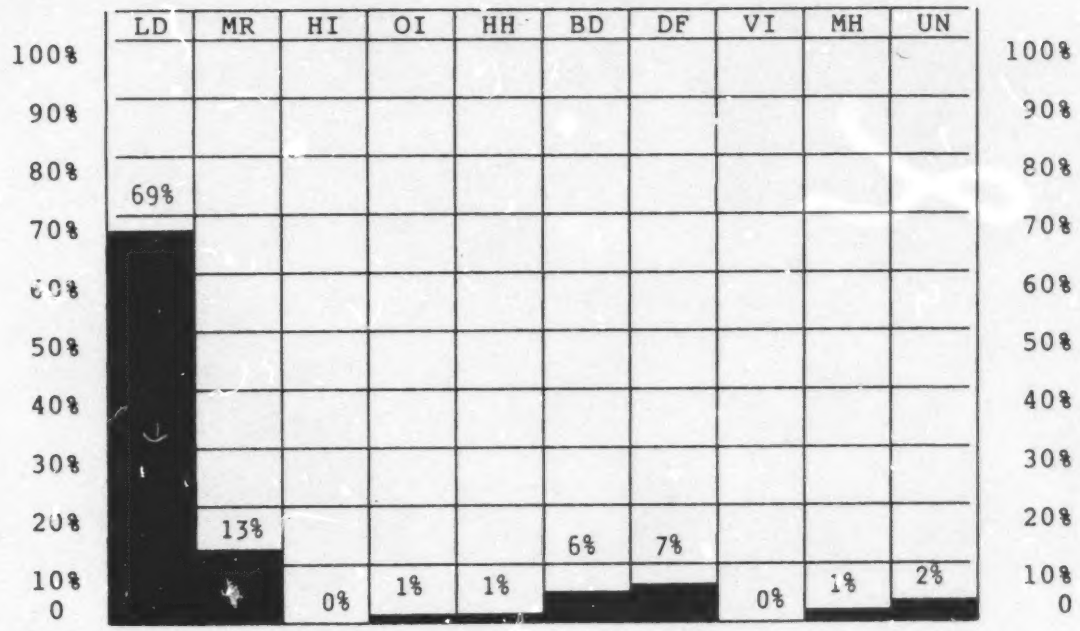
The educational classifications of the handicapped learners surveyed in this study are presented in Figure 1. Consistent with countywide enrollments, learning disabled and mentally retarded students constituted the bulk of the population surveyed (82 percent of the 194 students surveyed, and 82 percent of 1372 students enrolled, grades 10-12). The remaining 18 percent of those surveyed in the study were classified for educational purposes as orthopedically impaired, hard of hearing, behaviorally disordered, deaf, multi-handicapped, or unknown. In a small number of cases (two percent), the survey interviewers failed to include classification information on the reporting forms.

An analysis of the current employment status of the 194 former students showed that 102 of them were employed, at least part time, while 92 were unemployed. These figures represent 52 and 48 percent of the sample respectively. (See Figure 2.) By comparison, overall unemployment figures for the Pierce County area fluctuated between eleven and twelve percent during the time that this survey was conducted, and the county unemployment rate for the 18-24 age group during this time stood at 22.7 percent (Washington Employment Security Department, Labor Area Summary, 1984).

FIGURE 1

TYPES OF HANDICAPPED LEARNERS SURVEYED

N=194

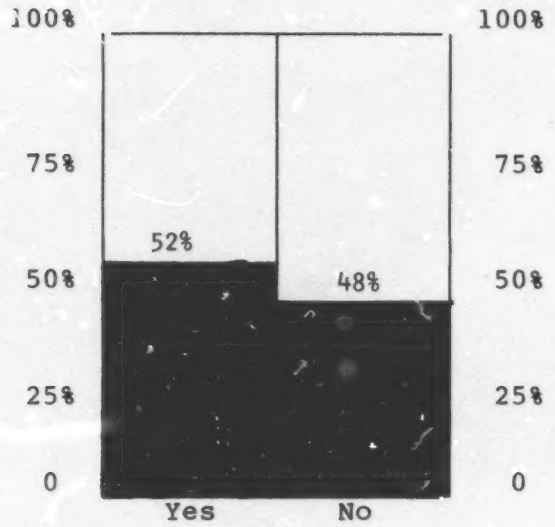


LD=Learning Disabled
MR=Mentally Retarded
HI=Hearing Impaired
OI=Orthopedically Imp.
HH=Hard of Hearing
BD=Behaviorally Disabled
DF=Deaf
VI=Visually Impaired
MH=Multi-handicapped
UN=Unknown

FIGURE 2

Current Employment Status
1983-84 Baseline Year

N=194



The types of jobs or actual job titles of the 52 percent of the identified population currently employed is presented in Chart One. These job titles were provided by respondents during the interview process.

CURRENTLY EMPLOYED

Job Titles

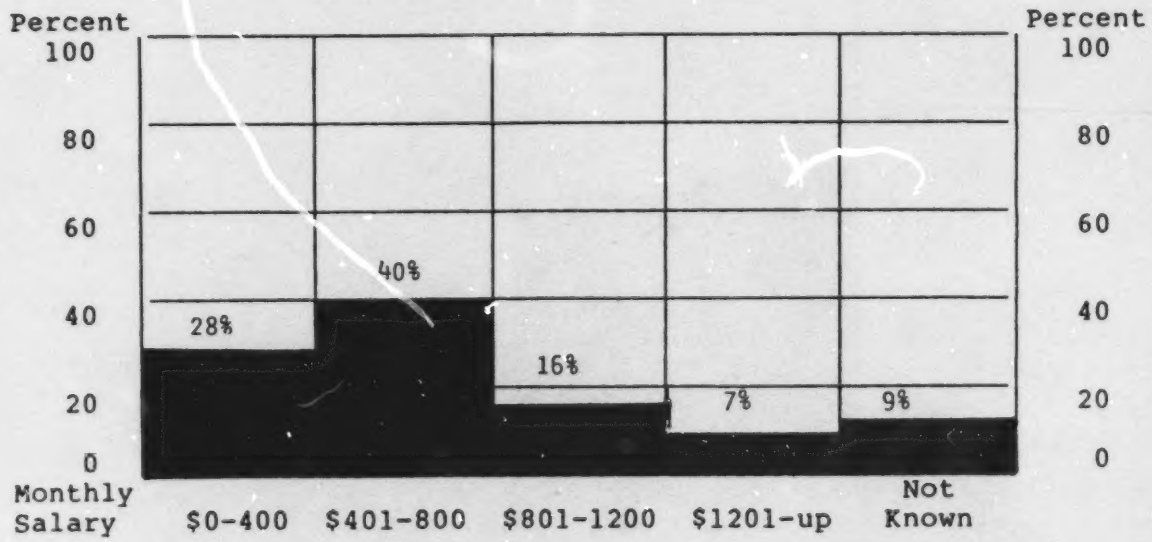
Airman (U.S.A.F.)
Assembly Line Worker
Auto Body Repair (Sander)
Auto Mechanic
Baby Sitter
Bagboy
Bakery Worker
Busperson
Cabinet Maker
Car Dealership Worker
Carpentry Area
Cashier/Checker
City Employee
Clerk
Commercial Artist
Concrete Framer
Construction (Navy)
Construction Worker
Craft Show/Fair Worker
Custodian
Dairy Worker
Dish Washer
Door Construction Worker
Farm Laborer
Fast Food Worker
Fisherman
Furniture Mover
Glazier
Goodwill Industry Worker
Grocery Clerk
Heavy Equipment Operator (Part Time)
Heavy Equipment (Army)
Housekeeper (Nursing Home)
Janitor
Job Corps
Kitchen Helper
Laborer
Lumber Mill Worker
Machinist's Helper
Mechanic's Helper
Military
Military (Security)
Military (Sergeant)
National Guard
Nurse's Aide/Orderly
Painter/Sand Blaster
Park Employee
Planer Operator (Sawmill)
Plastic Caster
Playground Assistant
Produce Manager
Retail Store Worker
Sawmill Worker
Secretary
Stockperson
Teacher's Aide
Telephone Solicitation
Topping Motors (Clean-up)
Tow Truck Operator
Truck Driver
Truck Driver (Army)
Truck Washer
U.S. Army Reserves
Waitress
Warehouse Worker

The salary ranges of those former students who were employed are pictured in Figure 3. Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed gross less than $801 per month; 28 percent gross in the $0-$400 range; and 40 percent gross in the $401-800 range. Twenty-three percent gross more than $801 per month with seven percent of that group making in excess of $1200 per month. Wage scales for nine percent of those employed were unknown.

FIGURE 3

Salary Range of Currently Employed Handicapped Population

N=102

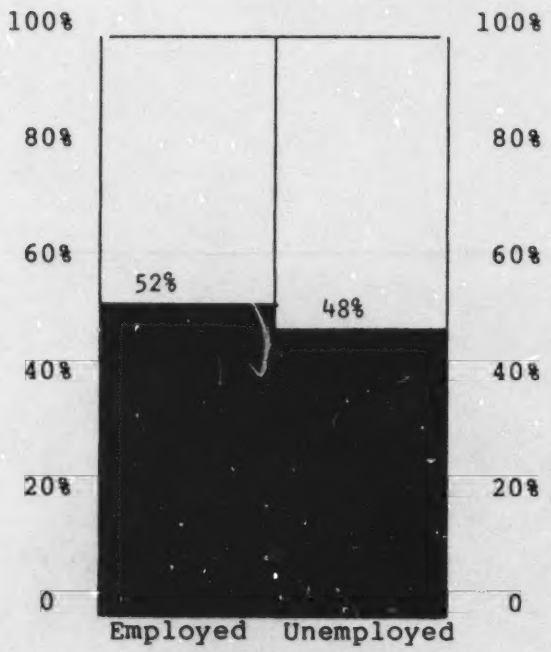


The respondents who were unemployed at the time of the study were asked if they had been employed at any time during the past three years (1981-1983). Fifty-two percent reported that they had been employed, and 48 percent reported that they had not been employed during that period of time. This is depicted in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4

Not Employed At Time of Study, But Had Been Employed Within the Past Three Years

N=92



The job titles for the formerly employed students are presented in Chart Two. When compared to the job titles of the students who were employed at the time of the study, there appears to be little difference. Although the range of occupational areas for this group is somewhat broad, the range of duties within the broad categories is limited. This can be seen when the job titles are matched to the reported salary levels.

CHART TWO

Job Titles for Students Not Employed at Time of Study

(But who have been employed within the last three years)

Job Titles

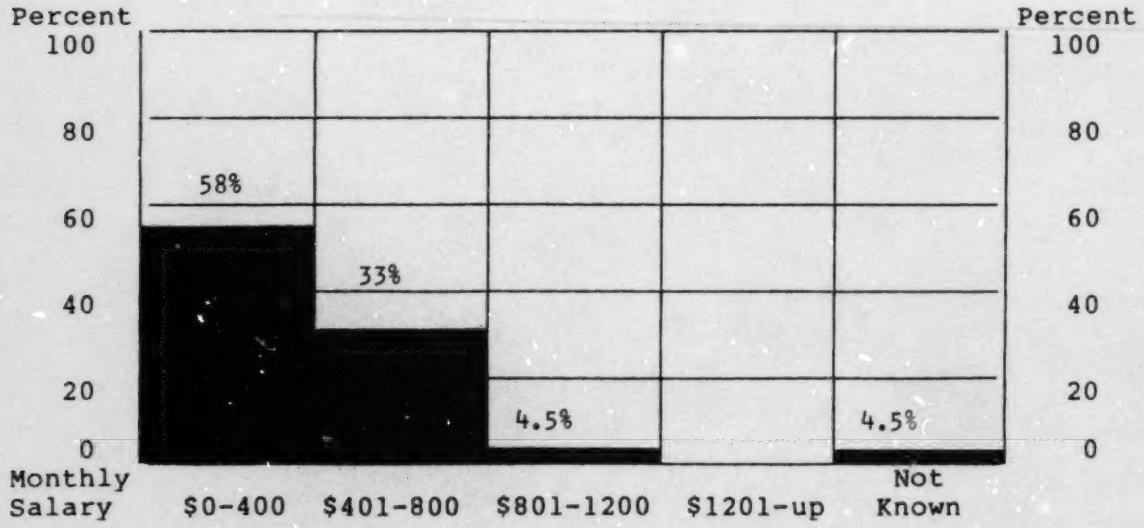
Assembly Line Worker
Busboy
Child Care Attendant
Clerk
Construction
Construction, Road Crew (3 weeks only)
Custodial
Custodial (Manpower)
Cut Firewood
Day Care
Deck Hand (Fishing Boat)
Dishwasher
Driver
Fast Food Worker
Goodwill Industries Worker
Janitor
Job Corps
Laborer
Landscape Helper
Military
Motel Housekeeper
Nursing Home Aide
Office Clerk
Orderly
Park Employee (3 months)
Plastics Regrinder
Produce Worker
Steam Cleaner Operator
Stockboy
Waitress
Worked at Travel Agency

Figure 5 represents the salary ranges of the 92 students not working at the time of the study, but who had worked within the past three years. Ninety-one percent of this group grossed less than $801 per month. Fifty-eight percent of the group earned less than $401 per month. These salary ranges for this group are somewhat lower than the salary levels of the group which was employed at the time of the study. Length of time on the job and inflation factors during the last three years may have contributed to this difference as the job titles are essentially the same for both groups.

FIGURE 5

Salary Range of Population Not Employed
at Time of Study, But Worked
Within Past Three Years

N=92

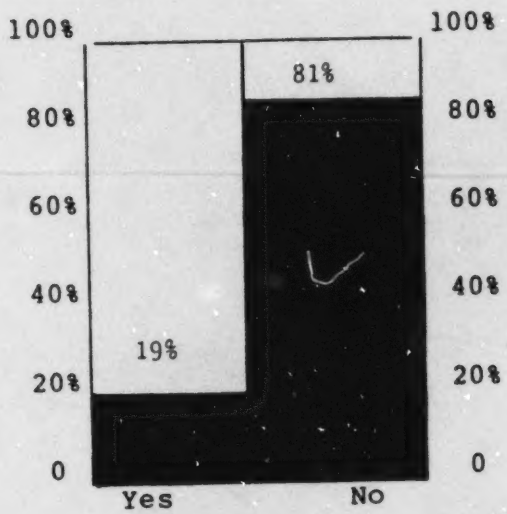


The percentage of the sample that was involved in educational programs beyond high school at the time of the survey is shown in Figure 6. Only 37 of the 194 students reported themselves as taking any post secondary schooling. This represents 19 percent of the total population polled.

FIGURE 6

Currently Involved in
Post Secondary
Educational Programs

N=194



In an effort to determine the nature of their post secondary involvement, respondents were asked to identify whether the programs in which they were participating were academically or vocationally oriented. These results are presented in Figure 7, and Chart Three describes the school and type of program that the 37 former special education students are enrolled in.

FIGURE 7

Nature of
Post Secondary
Involvement

N=37

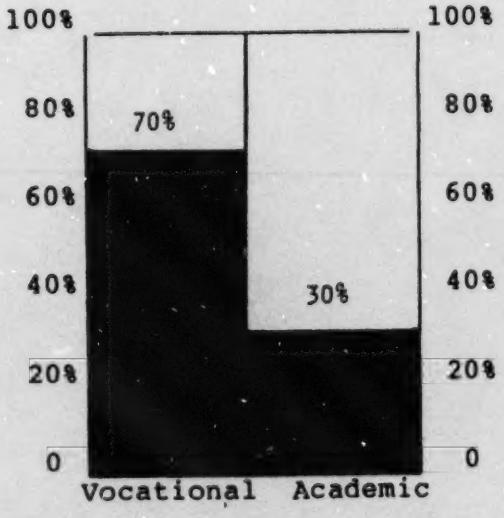


CHART THREE

POST SECONDARY INVOLVEMENT

School

Bates Vocational-Technical Institute
Beauty School (Private)
California State University
Central Washington University
Clover Park Vocational-Technical Institute
Fort Steilacoom Community College
Galaudet College, Washington, D.C.
Goodwill Industries Training Program
Green River Community College
Knapp Business College
Lakes High School (Dropped out then returned)
Seattle Community College
South Carolina (College)
Spokane (College)
Tacoma Community College

Type of Program

Vocational	Academic
Airline Stewardess	11 pursuing academic goals
Automotive	
Business and Office	
Child Care	
Cosmetology	
Drafting	
Food Service	
Heavy Equipment Mechanic	
Machinist Program	
Marine Diesel	
Metals	
Nursing	
Real Estate	
Technical Illustration	
Welding	

OBSERVATIONS:

According to the results of this study, handicapped learners have about a 50/50 chance of being employed upon graduating or leaving secondary schools in Pierce County, Washington. The unemployment rate of approximately one-half of this group is more than double the unemployment rate of all 18-24 year olds in the county which currently stands at 22.7 percent, and more than four times the overall county unemployment rate of 11-12 percent.

At current wages, 28 percent of the total sample (N=194) will gross less than $4,800 annually, and an additional 40 percent will earn an average wage of $7,200 per year. The following facts and figures are given to put wage earning capability of former special education students in Pierce County into perspective:

1. Annual national poverty level figures were:
   $4,980 for a family unit of one;
   $6,720 for a family unit of two;
   $8,460 for a family unit of three.

2. For 1981, the average annual salary in Pierce County was $16,017.

3. For 1981, the average annual salary in Washington State was $17,043.

4. For 1981, the average annual salary across the nation was $15,691.

5. For 1983, minimum hourly wage workers earned an annual salary of $6,960 ($3.35 per hour, average of 173 hours per month).

(Washington Employment Security Department, Research and Analysis Branch, 1984)

The 1984 average annual wages of former special education students amounted to 30 to 60 percent of the 1981 average annual wage in Pierce County (1981 figures were the latest available which compare Pierce County, Washington State, and the nation).

Twenty-three percent of the former students surveyed do not work at the present time and have not worked during the past three years. When this 23 percent is added to the 28 percent who presently earn less than national poverty level figures, it represents over one-half of the group that was surveyed. In other words, one out of every two former students in the study either has not worked or has earned less than national poverty level wages in the past three years.

The prospects for going on to post secondary training for the sample population do not appear promising with over 80 percent reporting no involvement with post secondary education. Of the 19 percent who were pursuing post high school training, 70 percent were enrolled in a vocational, as opposed to an academic curriculum.

SUMMARY:

The outcomes of this study clearly express the need for timely and assertive school based intervention into the occupational preparation of handicapped youth in Pierce County. This intervention should culminate in either the

development of job entry level skills and/or the foundation for meaningful post secondary vocational involvement at the close of the high school experience. The resolute pursuit of this mission will enable future generations of former special education students to more adequately respond to the workaday world they will ultimately encounter.

The emerging national and local emphasis on a school to work transition and concern about the economic ramifications of providing increased vocational opportunities for handicapped youth in Pierce County seems well founded in light of the results of this study. Cooperative efforts between special and vocational education are viewed as a solid step in the direction towards enabling secondary handicapped learners to become more self-sufficient and less dependent upon public assistance. As cooperation between vocational and special education becomes more definitive, meaningful linkages between these education-based programs and community-based employment must be conceived, constructed and continuous. Without purposeful attempts in this regard, whatever happens occupationally with this population remains a relative game of chance.

REFERENCES

Washington Employment Security Department, Labor Area Summary, Olympia, Washington. June, 1984.

Washington Employment Security Department, Research and Analysis Branch, Olympia, Washington. June, 1984.

APPENDIX A

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

GOAL: For each special education teacher on the cost sharing model, the district will locate and survey up to five special education students who have graduated or left school within the past three years.

Recommended Procedure: Have secondary special education teachers make phone contacts and ask survey questions.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Name: _____ School _____

Handicap: _____ Year Left: _____

1. Are you currently employed? Yes____ No ____

   A. If yes:
   A.1 - Job Title (include military)_____

   A.2 - Salary Range (month): ____$0-$400 ____$401-$800

   ____$801-1200 ____$1201-Up ____Don't Know

   B. If no:
   B.1 - Have been employed in the last three years:

   _____Yes _____No

   If yes:
   B.2 - Last Job Title:_____

   B.3 - Last Salary Range (month):

   ____$0-400 ____$401-$800 ____$801-$1200

   ____$1200-Up ____Don't Know

2. Are you currently in school? _____Yes _____No

   If yes: Where:_____

   What type of program: Vocational or Academic

   If Vocational, Name of Program: _____

COMMENTS:

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